

Date: Sun, 13 Dec 2009 23:16:39 +1100
From: Robert Sinnerbrink <Robert.Sinnerbrink@SCMP.MQ.EDU.AU>
Subject: Re: FILM-PHILOSOPHY Digest - 9 Dec 2009 to 10 Dec 2009 (#2009-338)

Dear Aaron,

You're quite right about the contested, controversial, and possibly =
vacuous character of those unfortunate terms 'analytic' and 'Continental'. =
And you are also quite right that many philosophers dislike or dismiss the =
terms outright. Be that as it may, they are historically inherited, =
pragmatic, even political terms that do pick out different ways of doing =
philosophy, and even manage to serve as markers of particular areas and =
styles of research (though what, precisely, the relevant criteria are in =
these instances raises all the arguments and debates to which you =
allude).=20

Despite their conceptual imprecision, for example, there are many =
self-identified analytic or Continental philosophers out there who would =
describe their work in these ways; there are various learned or professiona=
l societies that identify themselves using these titles; there are book =
series, journals, articles, and conferences dedicated to such things; =
there are warring theoretical camps (even in film theory!), not to =
mention--being practical for a moment--job descriptions (very important, I =
should think), even whole departments that, for better or worse, use these =
terms to signal "what we do around here". So I don't think that one's own =
dislike of the terms (which I share, to an extent), or complaints =
concerning their vacuity, entails that they are not meaningful or =
pragmatically effective; whether they are desirable or not is another =
question.

In any event, there's a very interesting history of the emergence of these =
terms, which would repay further study for most philosophers, whether they =
endorse the terms or not. You might want to look at Simon Critchley's =
little book, *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, or Simon =
Glendinning's interesting sceptical take on the debate, *The Idea of =
Continental Philosophy*. Despite his scepticism towards the very idea of an =
'analytic'/'Continental' divide, Glendinning shows that the terms came =
into vogue thanks to the emerging analytic movement's attempts at =
self-definition in the post-War period (see the famous essays by Gilbert =
Ryle, R.M. Hare, and G. Warnock), a rather reactive self-definition in =
which the new logic, methods of analysis, and eschewal of rhetoric and =
speculative systems in favour of argument, clarity, and piecemeal =
theorising were pitted against intellectually and morally corrupting =
'Continental' sophistry and pseudo-theorisation (meaning here Heidegger =
and French phenomenology). These 'criticisms' have been dutifully =
rehearsed and reiterated ever since.

You may well recognise some of these moves because they were rehearsed, =
with striking fidelity, in the famous critique of "Grand Theory" launched =
by Bordwell and Carroll, and Allen and Smith, in their pathbreaking =
volumes on film and philosophy (*Post-Theory*, and *Film Theory and Philosophy*)=
. I've written a piece on the role of the analytic/Continental divide in =

recent film theory that argues along these lines, forthcoming in a book on the so-called "divide" (called Postanalytic Metacontinental: Crossing Philosophical Divides), which has some very interesting and diverse chapters ... I'm guessing by the toc, of course!).

Your authority on the matter, Brian Leiter, has undeniable institutional clout; but I'm not sure that his pronouncements on the analytic-Continental debate are the last word intellectually. There are quite a few philosophers (e.g. David West, Robert Pippin, Simon Critchley, Glendinning, Hans-John Glock, Alain Badiou, to name a few) who have done impressive and interesting work in trying to articulate the relevant differences between 'analytic' and 'Continental' philosophy, whether with regard to style, tradition, methodology, or topic areas. And it is in dialogue with their work that I think the most interesting arguments and debates can take place.

For my own part, I follow Bordwell/Carroll's and Allen/Smith's characterization of the 'divide' between old film theory and new as one way of capturing the difference: they argue that the new way of film theory is against the 'Continental' style of philosophising (associated with film/screen theory of the 1970s and 80s); that it draws on the tools and techniques of analytic philosophy (and analytic aesthetics); and that it is inspired (at least for some) by the new developments in cognitive psychology and cognitive science, which provide an alternative theoretical approach to the dominant psychoanalytical model. Hence "analytic-cognitivist" philosophy of film (for which I am indebted to Bordwell/Carroll and Allen/Smith!)

Regards,
Robert

Date: Wed, 9 Dec 2009 13:29:07 -0500
From: Aaron Smuts <asmuts@GMAIL.COM>
Subject: Re: FILM-PHILOSOPHY Digest - 7 Dec 2009 to 8 Dec 2009 (#2009-336)

Well accepted or not, they lack substance. The term "analytic" philosophy doesn't pick out anything clearly. Nor does "Continental." Besides, I'm not so sure that the terms are very well accepted. There are many philosophers, me included, that don't think that the distinction is useful. Leiter's recent post on the putative distinction is insightful:

<http://brianleiternietzsche.blogspot.com/2009/11/continental-philosophy-vs-party-line.html>

The terms are even less useful when it comes to characterizing film theory. There are definitely some distinctions that we might want to track. At the moment, I don't have any great labels. I'm also afraid of labeling anything cognitivist. It's decidedly not a school. Merely eschewing grand theorizing and appeals to authority does not make a school. In contrast, the homogeneity of Screen Theory does have all the trappings of a school. I'm not sure how best to characterize the array more recent work.

Aaron

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